One significant aspect of Stalin’s normalization of church-state relations in 1943-1944 across the USSR was the creation and re-opening of several religious educational establishments under the aegis of legally recognized “spiritual assemblies” such as the Russian Orthodox Church and the four Islamic muftiates (Russian, *Musul’manskie dukhovnye upravleniiia*). In the nearly five decades of Soviet history following World War II the Party-state allowed the Central Asian muftiate (hereafter designated by its Russian acronym SADUM) to administer three such Islamic establishments, referred to here as madrasas: the Barakxon Madrasa in Tashkent, at the elementary school level, which functioned from 1949-1964; the Mir-i Arab Madrasa, at the high school level, which re-opened in Bukhara in 1945 after closing in the 1920s; and the Imom al-Buxoriy Islamic Institute (commonly referred to as *Oliy Ma’had*), offering the equivalent of a college education, founded in Tashkent in 1971. Debate within SADUM and the Party-state concerning these madrasas revolved most pressingly around what form Islamic education should take in a secular and Socialist society.

Over several decades Soviet Uzbekistan witnessed the emergence of a utilitarian model of Islamic education designed to produce religious bureaucrats who would enter service in the USSR’s four muftiates. This model brought together several functional elements which, taken together, lent the madrasas a degree of prominence, visibility, and

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1 SADUM used the term *madrasa* to refer to the Barakxon and Mir-i Arab madrasas in Uzbek, while using *madrasa* and the Russian *uchilishche* interchangeably in Russian correspondence. Although the Ma’had was never described as a madrasa I use the term as a general category of educational institution for the sake of convenience.
political significance that went far beyond the wartime religious reforms’ intent. I argue that four groups with a stake in church-state relations each contributed at least one distinctive element to this model. First, the moderate line towards religion within the Party-state, represented by the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) under the Council of Ministers, advocated the idea that SADUM should enjoy latitude to educate imams whose credentials and erudition Central Asian Muslims would take seriously. To this end it encouraged a generous measure of autonomy for the muftiate in determining admissions standards and curricular requirements. Second, the hard line towards religion with Nikita S. Khrushchev (Party chairman, 1954-1964) at its helm believed the madrasas’ primary purpose was to support Soviet public diplomacy in the Muslim and developing worlds. Third, SADUM stressed that the madrasas should embody a highly textual, scripturalist, vision of Islam compatible with Soviet modernity, while gradually secularizing the curriculum, a discourse that blended together Jadid, Communist, and Salafist themes. Fourth, the unregistered ‘ulama (i.e., jurisconsults who did not work for the muftiate) developed a mostly symbiotic relationship with the official madrasas, establishing an informal and even cooperative relationship between the official and unofficial realms of Islamic education. SADUM’s two functioning madrasas at the Soviet era’s end, the Mir-i Arab in Buxoro and the Ma’had in Tashkent, combined these elements, projecting an image of progressive, pro-Soviet, scripturalist Islam at home and abroad, while training religious cadres to serve the muftiates and, by extension, the Party-state.

This model of bureaucratized Islamic education could claim little or no grounding, either in the spirit of Stalin’s wartime reforms, or in the curricula or teaching
methods of madrasas active in Central Asia until the late 1920s. It emerged as a result of the unpredictable and at times chaotic trajectory of Soviet religious policy after World War II.

The Hard and Moderate Lines

Stalin’s normalization of church-state relations in 1943-1944 reflected a tectonic shift in the Party-state’s attitude towards religion. The desire to wipe out religion, violently implemented during the Cultural Revolution (1928-1932) and Great Terror (1937-1938) through persecution of clergy, closure of schools, and confiscation of structures used for religious purposes, gave way to a strategy of containment. The reforms were not formulated with Islam in mind, however: Stalin chiefly sought to mobilize the Russian Orthodox Church in patriotic war efforts, and to allay Allied public opinion concerning the treatment of Christians within the USSR. Therefore the reforms were applied to other officially sanctioned faiths such as Islam and Buddhism almost as an afterthought, with little attention or interest from the country’s senior leadership.

For the USSR’s historically Muslim communities the reforms entailed reconstituting three Tsarist-era muftiates in Baku, Buinaks and Ufa, while establishing a body for the five Central Asian republics, SADUM, in Tashkent; creating CARC to supervise all the officially sanctioned religious organizations except the Russian Orthodox Church (which was monitored by another new bureaucracy); and reopening the

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400 year old Mir-i Arab madrasa under SADUM’s administration.² Virtually no clear guidance from the senior leadership accompanied pronouncement of these reforms, meaning that the course of their actual implementation could vary radically depending on the ideological disposition of local government bodies. Hence the emergence of a hard and moderate line towards religion within the Party-state.

The moderate line crystallized around CARC bureaucrats, who had an interest in ensuring that religious policies were implemented consistently throughout the country, ideally under their exclusive supervision. CARC envisioned a contained but legally inviolable space for religion in a society committed to the rule of Socialist legality. To this end they promoted SADUM’s autonomy from local government meddling and even advocated on behalf of the muftiate in disputes with Muslim communities over control of mosques and charitable donations. In this effort, they confronted zealous Party officials at the regional and district level who often sought to demonstrate their anti-religious zeal. Such hardliners eschewed the anti-religious violence of earlier decades but viscerally objected to any suggestion of a permanent normalization of religion in the USSR. After reacting to the moderate climate of the 1940s and 1950s with bewilderment they gained significant clout during Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign of 1959-1964.

Religious Education in the USSR

² The Spiritual Assembly of the Muslims of Transcaucasia in Baku, known by the Russian acronym DUMZ, succeeded a similar body established by the Tsarists in Tbilisi. The Muslim Spiritual Assembly of the North Caucasus (DUMSK), established in Buinaksk and later moved to Makhachkala, Dagestan, held responsibility for the Caucasian republics within the RSFSR. The Muslim Spiritual Assembly of European Russia and Siberia (DUMES), based in Ufa, was successor to the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly created by Catherine the Great in 1788. Though never formally closed down, this body was barely active during the 1930s and stopped functioning completely from 1936-1942, when it participated in a patriotic conference. Yaacov Ro’i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: from World War II to Perestroika* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 100-105.
Unlike certain policy questions which generated acrimonious debate between the hard and moderate lines, such as the number of houses of worship the Soviet state should legalize, official discussion concerning religious education largely remained muted. This undoubtedly stemmed from the success of earlier anti-religious drives in nearly destroying institutionalized religious education across the USSR. Seminaries belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church were closed summarily throughout the NEP period, but the process took longer in Central Asia due to the decentralized nature of Islamic education and because the Bolsheviks were wary of attacking Islam until the late 1920s. Nevertheless, from 1926 onwards the state prioritized expanding Soviet schools at the expense of all religious education in the country. The initial and most fearsome phase of dekulakization and collectivization (1928-1932) featured an extremely damaging assault not only on religious personnel but also the premises of seminaries, schools, and madrasas, which were confiscated for use by newly constituted collective farms as clubs (since in many areas these buildings often boasted greater structural integrity than ordinary dwellings) or, more commonly, as storage depots and stables. Subsequently the Great Terror of 1937-1938 dealt an even more severe blow through systematic arrests and executions of clergy. Knowledge and authority figures simply disappeared from many districts. These measures did not bring an end to the informal transmission of religious

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5 O. N. Petiukova, Pravovye formy otnoshenii Sovetskogo gosudarstva i Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi v 1917-1945 godakh (Moscow: Zakon i Pravo, 2012), 236-237. In Central Asia: KRBMA 2597/1s/1/3 (July 10, 1945); KRBMA 2597/2s/8/2 (May 24, 1946); KRBMA 2597/1s/47/87 (January 20, 1956).

6 According to one estimate the NKVD arrested 150,000 Russian Orthodox clergy in 1937, subsequently executing 80,000. M. V. Shkarovskii, Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov’ pri Staline i Khrushcheve (gosudarstvenno-tserkovnye otnosheniia v SSSR v 1939-1964 gg.) (Moscow: Krutitskoe Patriarshee Podvor’e, Obshchestvo liubitelei tserkovnoi istorii, 1999), 93.

7 To take one example, of the many thousands of Buddhist lamas arrested in Buriatiia during the Terror, only 500 returned from the GULag, 62 with the highest rank of gabzha and 121 with the degree of gebshi. For this account and on the legally recognized Buddhist Spiritual Assembly in Soviet Buriatiia more generally see Ts. P. Vanchikova and D. G. Chimit dorzhin, Istoriia Buddizma v Buriatiii: 1945-2000 gg.
knowledge, but they greatly harmed one of the vital functions of religious education: producing credentialed, learned practitioners capable of interpreting religious law and dogma for the needs of community and society.

Stalin’s religious reforms nominally acknowledged this function by permitting educational establishments for several of the country’s sanctioned religions. These included a seminary and seven schools across Russia and Ukraine under the Russian Orthodox Church, a “spiritual academy” run by the Armenian Gregorian Church, and the Mir-i Arab. (Over a decade later, a yeshiva also opened in Moscow with the Party’s blessing.) The wartime Party-state recognized that its reforms would carry only symbolic significance if the newly legalized churches and muftiates lacked the means to train personnel. Yet these institutions differed fundamentally from their predecessors in the early and pre-Soviet eras in two important ways. First, in terms of scope, policymakers envisioned a restricted arena that would produce the bare minimum number of clergy, or less, for religious organizations to function in skeletal fashion. Second, they introduced a degree of supervision, interference, and bureaucratization, both from the state and the newly sanctioned spiritual assemblies, that lacked precedent in religious education anywhere in the former Russian Empire.

(Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2006), 37. Similarly, one report from Tajikistan noted that “30 influential clergy members” (a bureaucratic code word for ‘ulama) resided in one district “until 1937”. BMJT 1516/1/44/27 (April 5, 1955).
8 Independently of the reforms Stalin also permitted one Catholic seminary to continue functioning in newly conquered Lithuania.
9 A. A. Fast, Sovetskoе gosudarstvo, religiia i tserkov’ 1917-1990: dokumenty i materialy (Barnaul: Altai, 2009), 61. On the Orthodox seminary, see Protoierei Aleksii Marchenko, Religioznaia politika Sovetskogo gosudarstva v gody pravleniia N. S. Khruschehva i ee vliianie na tserkovnuiu zhizn’ v SSSR (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Krutitskogo podvor’ia, Obshchestvo liubitelei tserkovnoi istorii, 2010), 254-262.
Nowhere was this more the case in Central Asia, especially in the agricultural zones, where education in madrasas of various ranks was the norm for a significant part of the population. Formally constituted madrasas usually taught boys but in parts of the Farg’ona Valley permanent schools for girls existed as well.\(^{11}\) In 1927, i.e., at the dawn of the first major anti-religious campaign in Central Asia, the Uzbek Statistical Administration uncovered 21,183 students studying in 1,362 “old method schools” across the republic.\(^ {12}\) The following year, the Uzbek government adopted a decree “On the Liquidation of Old Method Schools and Madrasas” which relegated institutionalized Islamic education to an underground existence, possibly lasting until the Terror.\(^ {13}\)

Although the Mir-i Arab could not, and was not intended to, resurrect this grand educational legacy, its selection as the sole legal madrasa in the USSR was not accidental. Since its construction in 1503 the institution had acquired renown across Eurasia as a center of Islamic learning. Moreover it enjoyed significant historical ties with Russia: its graduates included Muhammad Husain, whom Catherine the Great appointed as first mufti of the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly in 1788, as well as Galimdzhhan Barudi, leader of the First All-Russian Muslim Congress in Moscow in May 1917.\(^ {14}\) This legacy undoubtedly informed the decision to allow students selected by the

\(^{11}\) For example, a Tsarist survey of Andijon province in 1908 enumerated 1,854 madrasas teaching 26,446 boys and 583 girls’ schools (otin oyi maktabi) enrolling 6,913 girls. Rustambek Shamsutdinov and Baxtiyor Rasulov, *Turkiston maktab va madrasalari tarixi (XIX asr oxiri-XX asr boshlari)* (Andijon: Andijon State University named after Bobur, 1995), 72.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 246.

three Russian muftiates to study in Bukhara. According to one recent commentator, the four Soviet muftis based their appeal to reopen the Mir-i Arab on “the need to once again prepare qualified religious cadres, imams and jurisconsults to replace those who died in the repressions of the years of militant atheism.”

Whatever the four muftis’ intentions, this was clearly not a goal religious policymakers envisioned for the institution in the years immediately following World War II. For one, the reforms did not grant SADUM control of the premises; the muftiate rented it from a bureaucracy charged with conserving historical structures, the State Architecture Directorate, for a sum of 50,000 rubles a year until well into the late 1950s. To make matters worse, the directorate rented out part of the madrasa’s lower floor as living space throughout this period. The building’s surroundings were not conducive to religious study, either: a Disease Control Station (epidimicheskaia stantsiia) occupied the small space separating the Mir-i Arab from the neighboring city library, which “releases an array of chemical fumes out into the open, harmful to a person’s health.” The station’s courtyard bordering the madrasa’s cafeteria “constantly holds horses and donkeys who on hot days emit an excruciatingly foul stench.” Plumbing problems prevented students and staff alike from ever turning off the water, which ran constantly. Students complained

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15 Their numbers always remained very small, however, with students from outside of Central Asia admitted only rarely. For example, neither the 1956 nor the 1962 admitted classes included any students nominated by the other three muftiates, while three students sent by the Ufa Muftiate in 1958 were expelled (along with three Central Asian students) for poor grades. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/1/20-21 (September 22, 1956); O’zRMDA r-2456/1/231/38 (May 18, 1959); KRBMA 2597/2/55/196 (September 28, 1962). Their treatment eventually became a bone of contention, as evinced in an angry letter authored by Russian mufti Abdulbari Isaev to SADUM’s mufti Boboxonov in 1977 complaining of discrimination against non-Central Asian students at the Mir-i Arab. Isaev asked Boboxonov “to please accept our children” because Russian mosques “are in dire need of staff”. Curiously, though, the letter concludes with a request to remove one student because of his advanced age. “Kindly expel him from the madrasa,” the communication ends. “He is ready to kick the bucket.” O’zRMDA r-2456/1/585/73-74 (October 18, 1977).
16 Usmankhodzhaev, op. cit., 51.
17 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/136/8-9 (October 24, 1951).
18 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/1/95 (June 20, 1956).
of dark rooms and rotting walls that leaked, giving off “a bad smell” that “impacts human health”. In these conditions the madrasa’s prospects for supplying bright, energetic minds to serve in the four Soviet muftiates (let alone rejuvenating Islamic education in the USSR!) seemed grim; the Mir-i Arab languished as a forgotten addendum to Stalin’s religious reforms. Yet a particular convergence of political and bureaucratic interests brought official Islamic education to unexpected prominence.

The Moderate Line and the Need for Viable Madrasas

The moderate line spearheaded by CARC adopted a tacitly eschatological approach to the anti-religious struggle, maintaining that education, persuasion, and effective propaganda would succeed in winning over the believers to atheism where extra-legal measures, administrative coercion, and offensive media blitzes must certainly fail. This approach had roots both in Bolshevik promotion of a “conciliatory” approach towards the peasantry during the NEP years, and in the notion that a Communist society must abide by the rule of law, including the guarantee of freedom of conscience stated in the Stalin Constitution. In a postwar political climate which lacked active state support for scientific atheism, moderate liners hoped to channel all religious life into the auspices of the officially recognized spiritual assemblies, as an embodiment of religion’s place in a Socialist society.

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19 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/268/77 (June 11, 1960); O’zRMDA r-2456/1/231/106 (September 3, 1958). “Ba’zi xujralar / ikki xujra / ichkarilikda buliv, korangiligi va hovasini buzilishi ila shikoyatga sabab buldi.”
20 Bukharin and Preobrazhensky expressed this view best in 1920: “The campaign against the backwardness of the masses in this matter of religion, must be conducted with patience and considerateness, as well as with energy and perseverance. The credulous crowd is extremely sensitive to anything which hurts its feelings.” Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhenskii (Eden and Cedar Paul, trans.), The ABC of Communism: a popular explanation of the program of the Communist Party of Russia (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966). 
21 This stemmed in large part from the notion of a “return” to Socialist legality which, according to Peter Solomon, became the Stalinist justice system’s priority during the mid-1930s. Peter H. Solomon, Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 153.
The concept of a small but legally protected and genuinely functional madrasa fit this moderate posture towards religion in Soviet society exceptionally well. During the period from World War II until Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign of 1959-1964, CARC bureaucrats successfully argued for the expansion of a legalized sphere for Islamic education under SADUM’s supervision. Even when the moderate line fell into disfavor in 1959, the notion of a protected and permanent space for Muslim learning in Soviet society did not undergo attack. This permanence constituted the moderate line’s contribution to the Soviet model of Islamic education. CARC facilitated this outcome by promoting the madrasas’ autonomy from state meddling throughout the 1950s. Its representative for Kyrgyzstan expressed the prevailing line when he wrote that “Party and Soviet organs have nothing to do with the staffing or admissions procedures” of “these Muslim spiritual seminaries” because “this is a private religious affair” independent of the state. Although SADUM sent CARC annual reports at the end of each school year concerning curricular matters such as the number of subject hours taught in various disciplines, there is no evidence that the Party-state actively monitored the madrasas’ internal dealings until the early 1960s.

The most dramatic evidence of SADUM’s autonomy in managing Islamic education during this period is the reopening of the sixteenth century Barakxon Madrasa in 1956. For five years this elementary school level institution functioned with no official hindrance while lacking any clear legal status. According to CARC’s representative in Uzbekistan, the Soviet government’s decree of October 19, 1945 permitting the Mir-i

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23 KRBMA 2597s/1/12/34 (1949).
Arab to open also made provision for a second madrasa in Tashkent. SADUM’s second mufti would later claim that the muftiye did not have sufficient funds to avail itself of this opportunity to establish a second Islamic school. However, on August 15, 1949, the USSR Council of Ministers formally declared that the Mir-i Arab sufficed for the four muftiates’ needs and rejected any future attempt to open a madrasa in Tashkent. The muftiate’s success in opening the Barakxon with a five year curriculum on September 18, 1956 is therefore a radical testament to the moderate line’s commitment to SADUM in the flexible climate of the 1950s.

Despite their subsequent protestations that SADUM had acted illegally in opening the madrasa, CARC bureaucrats knew precisely what was going on. Two months before classes commenced at the Barakxon, the mufti’s son (and, in two years, second mufti) Boboxonov wrote CARC’s representative in Uzbekistan listing imams from several Tashkent mosques selected to offer instruction in religious subjects. He also complained of a dearth of available teachers in secular subjects, asking the representative to find “suitable comrades” to teach math, geography, and Russian in the school. SADUM later informed CARC of its decision to build two houses for the 16 families who resided in the the Barakxon and Kukaldosh madrasas (which had apparently been given over for use as communal apartments during collectivization). Soon after the school year began, SADUM apprised the Council that its curriculum included Principles of Religion (usul-i

24 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/136/8 (October 24, 1951).
25 O’zRMDA 42456/1/211/10 (October 10, 1957).
26 GARF r-6991/4/19/375 (March 16, 1950).
27 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/18 (July 17, 1956)
28 ibid. Also see a request written after the school had opened to the same effect from the Barakxon’s director, Fazil xo’ja Sodiqxo’jayev in O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/57 (November 20, 1956).
29 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/211/61 (1958). “Even though the aforementioned residents belong to various nationalities, and even though they are all blind, the Spiritual Assembly satisfied all their demands and gave them the opportunity to settle down.”
din), Islamic history, Qur’anic recitation (tajvid), Arabic morphology and syntax, calligraphy, Persian language, geography, and Russian. (Instructors for two other subjects in the curriculum, arithmetic and the USSR Constitution, had not yet been located.)

Subsequent correspondence included students’ daily schedules, and a list of the number of semester hours devoted to, first, each subject assigned to the five grades, and second, memorization of 22 short suras from the Qur’an. Other documentation compiled by the muftiate in 1956 apprising the Council of the Barakxon’s impending opening included a memorandum on the first admissions round and a final list of teaching staff.

This extensive record of transparency on SADUM’s part demonstrates the untenability of CARC’s claim to Uzbekistan’s Council of Ministers, two years into Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign, that the muftiate had “lacked authorization from the government” to open the “illegally functioning” Barakxon. As the documentation illustrates, the Council was well aware of every aspect of the institution’s establishment and operation. It is apparent that in the 1950s any formal “authorization” other than CARC’s tacit approval was not required in the sphere of Islamic education. This, indeed,

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30 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/58 (November 12, 1956).
31 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/66 (December 8, 1956). For example, the first grade curriculum included the following elementary subjects and semester hour assignments: belief (iman), 6 hours; ablution (tahorat), 4 hours; basics of prayer (namaz), 7 hours; religious requirements and etiquette (farz va adab), 8 hours; proper performance of the prayer (sajda, sujud), 6 hours; prayers to be recited during prostration, 10 hours; performance of the ‘eid and Friday prayers, 6 hours; how to wash one’s body and when it is religiously mandated, 6 hours; fasting and the evening prayer during Ramadhan (salah al-tarawih), 6 hours; the funeral prayer (salah al-janaza), 8 hours; performing ablutions with sand (tayammum), 4 hours; violation of ablution, 4 hours; required, recommended, and forbidden actions in religion (farz, voji, sunnat), the components of prayer, 4 hours; the rules of the travel prayer, 4 hours; review, 8 hours. One may legitimately question whether teaching staff actually adhered to this published schedule.
32 The Barakxon accepted 35 out of 60 applicants, of whom 32 enrolled. The report claimed that one candidate was denied admission “for being in the Komsomol Youth League”; however, a subsequent communication indicated that at least one student in the madrasa, Rahmat Askarov, was a Komsomol member. I have not located any further documentation to help determine whether CARC or SADUM had a fixed policy on admitting Komsomol members. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/207/14 (mid-1956); O’zRMDA r-2456/1/221/17 (January 8, 1957).
33 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/268/61-62.
34 OzRMDA r-2456/1/292/5 (November 1961).
fits in well with other aspects of religious policy during this period, such as CARC’s posture of indifference towards unregistered mosques operating beyond SADUM’s control. By accusing the muftiate of breaking the law, the bureaucrats sought to shift attention away from their central role in promoting the moderate line which first made it possible for an Islamic school to function openly with nebulous legal status in a society publicly committed to destroying religion. This profound shift in the political-religious landscape was perhaps best reflected several months before the Barakxon’s formal closure, when one of its former students, Asildinov, published a letter in Izvestiia announcing his decision to abandon Islam and become an atheist.35

_The Hard Line and Soviet Islam’s Internationalization_

During the anti-religious campaign, the Mir-i Arab very likely would have met the same fate as the Barakxon were it not for one constraint: Khrushchev’s passion for international public diplomacy.36 The status of Islam in the USSR suddenly acquired prominence for the country’s senior leadership for two reasons. Islam’s sole attraction to Khrushchev rested in his belief that Soviet Muslims could speak to their co-religionists abroad in ways the Communist Party could not. In these circumstances the madrasa acquired Union-wide significance as a showcase of Islamic education in the USSR. As a result, the Mir-i Arab became a central component of how the USSR advertised itself to the Muslim world, and serves the same function for the Uzbek government today.

Official attitudes towards the Mir-i Arab under Khrushchev reveal an elementary understanding that the madrasa’s very existence furnished a powerful testament to

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35 KRBMA 2597s/2s/49/13-14 (February 10, 1961); Asildinov, Abzaldyn, “Ia porval s islamom.” Izvestiia February 4, 1961: 3.
religious freedom in the USSR. Three students from the Mir-i Arab traveled to Al-Azhar in Cairo in 1955 for study, “in order to strengthen our ties with Egyptian ‘ulama and especially with the [Grand] Shaykh of Al-Azhar ‘Abd al-Rahman.” Two years later the muftiate outlined construction projects necessary to make the madrasas presentable to international visitors; they had been eliminated from the itinerary for Egyptian President Nasser’s upcoming visit to Uzbekistan due to the “narrow and crooked” streets leading to them. The authorities permitted SADUM to buy books for the Mir-i Arab’s library from Cairo in 1957, a nod, presumably, to the dismal state of its collection. By 1961, as SADUM’s international contacts skyrocketed, the role of Mir-i Arab students as ambassadors for Soviet Islam expanded beyond Egypt, the focus of SADUM’s initial public diplomacy drive in the 1950s, to the University of Damascus in Syria and al-

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37 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/211/62 (late 1957).
38 Ibid.
39 KRBMA 2597/1s/75/32 (May 12, 1958). To make matters worse, “due to the recent heavy rains many walls and buildings have fallen apart.”
41 The madrasa’s staff and students probably greeted this development as a major milestone since a dearth of textbooks featured frequently as a major complaint to SADUM’s leadership. Throughout the 1950s the Mir-i Arab’s holdings included a paltry list of works “that have no place in this century”. Their titles (in Russian transliteration) were “Vidan”, “Muzi”, “Zandzhani”, “Marakh”, “Shamiil”, “Kharakat”, al’fiia, “Durus-Nakhviia”, the Qur’anic commentary of Vaizavii and the hadith volume Mishkaf ul Miskab. Matters fared even worse at the Barakxon, where for the first grade two books were available (Din darslari or Lessons in Religion by Hasan Gali and Muallim al-’ibadah or Guide to Prayer by Habiburrahman Zabirov, both published in Kazan at the turn of the century) and for the second grade a book by Ahmad Hadi Maqsudi entitled “Drusi Shifakhiia” (?) and Mabda’ ul Qirat by Sungatulla Bekbulatov, published in Orenburg. The lack of textbooks meant that all instruction took place on the blackboard and teachers and students had to share the few volumes available. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/3 (June 1, 1956), 23 (September 22, 1956), and 25 (December 8, 1956).
Qarawiyyin in Morocco. These ties reflected a belief that the madrasa’s existence would speak for itself in the context of public diplomacy to Arab countries.

Soon, however, a high school level institution offering elementary religious instruction became a potential embarrassment, as it could validate claims about low levels of Islamic knowledge in the USSR. Khrushchev’s successors (after his ouster in 1964) wished to place Soviet madrasas even more squarely at the center of public diplomacy. This consideration animated their decision to open a university-level establishment, the Imom al-Buxoriy Islamic Institute (or more commonly Oliy Ma’had), in 1971. Its principal stated function was to prepare cadres who could represent Soviet Muslims to foreign interlocutors. As a SADUM proposal explained:

“Considering that the USSR’s spiritual assemblies feel the need for qualified cadres in their dealings with foreign nations, the higher school’s curriculum includes an array of specialized disciplines. Graduates should have: perfect knowledge of Arabic, Russian, and Uzbek; spoken English; a deep and multifaceted comprehension of the Qur’an and other sacred texts; and an all-encompassing perspective concerning international politics.”

This proposal to develop ‘well-rounded’ bureaucrats equally conversant in the secular and sacred realms reflected a strong urge to increase the madrasas’ profile in international affairs. Khrushchev’s initial emphasis on Islamic education’s political utility made it only logical for the Ma’had to acquire progressively greater prominence in foreign relations. This included hosting students from foreign countries, receiving delegations

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42 O’RMDA r-2456/1/309/106 (February 8, 1962).
43 This reasoning served as the basis for SADUM’s successful request in 1966 to increase the size of each incoming class in the Mir-i Arab from 40 to 50. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/443/102 (September 23, 1966).
44 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/518/54 (1971).
45 SADUM hoped that the its graduates would be “worthy” of an institution “whose prestige continues to grow from year to year and whose popularity is not inferior to that of the best known Islamic universities in the world.” “Graduating of Students at the Imam al-Bukhari Institute.” Muslims of the Soviet East, Vol. 4, No. 1408 (1987): 10.
of ‘ulama and dignitaries on state visits,\footnote{In 1981 the Ma’had opened two spots for students selected by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/640/8-15 (July 9, 1981).} and participating in public diplomacy conferences.\footnote{These were too numerous in quantity to fully chronicle here. Two prominent examples include a visit by the Islamic Council of Algeria to the Ma’had in 1984 and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed in 1987. “Guests from Malaysia.” Muslims of the Soviet East, Vol. 4, No. 1408 (1987): 19; Abdurazzak Yunus, “Distinguished Guests from Algeria.” Muslims of the Soviet East, Vol. 1, No. 1404 (1984): 10; O’zRMDA r-2456/1/733/114 (1987).} More dramatically, for the Soviet context, the Ma’had engaged in negotiations about educational exchange with the Saudi Muslim World League at a time when the USSR and Saudi Arabia lacked diplomatic relations.\footnote{In January 1983 the Ma’had hosted representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church’s academies in Moscow and Leningrad for a “conference” on nuclear disarmament. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/684/95 (January 3, 1984).} The Ma’had’s international activities represented an unprecedented level of activism on the state’s behalf and a radical transformation of the Mir-i Arab’s largely forgotten status in the first decade after Stalin’s religious reforms.

In this fashion the hard line against religion contributed the general principle of political utility and the specific rationale of international expediency to the evolving model of Islamic education in postwar Central Asia. Put more simply, hardliners grudgingly accepted that their atheist state needed Islamic education in some form to fulfill its political objectives abroad.

\textit{Functional Madrasas}

Much as they might have wished to, hardliners could not restrict the madrasas’ activity to foreign propaganda alone. The moderate and hard lines both required the institutions to be taken seriously as centers of Islamic learning at home (for the former) and abroad (for the latter). Within certain constraints, this fortuitous convergence of

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\footnote{In this interesting episode SADUM’s mufti Shamsuddinxon Boboxonov advocated accepting an offer by the ultra-Salafist MWL to conduct “seminars” in the Ma’had. The Soviet government apparently did not approve. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/639/8-10 (December 9, 1981).}
\end{flushright}
political interests allowed SADUM to articulate the functions and determine the content of the learning it imparted in the Mir-i Arab and the Ma’had. SADUM attacked this task with two objectives: first, to develop a pool of Islamic bureaucrats to advance its mission of institutional expansion in Central Asia; and second, to embody a progressive Islam in harmony with Soviet society and, more generally, the modern world. The pivotal figure in driving this transformation was SADUM’s extraordinarily ambitious, energetic, and authoritarian mufti as of 1957, Ziyovuddin Boboxonov (1918-1982). He shared, and energetically implemented, the moderate line’s view that his organization should embody a dynamic, progressive Muslim community committed to upholding the Soviet state’s political objectives (with the obvious exception of atheism).

His attempt to make the curriculum more functional in order to produce useful employees focused first on the issue of language. The two madrasas progressively channeled resources and semester hours to Arabic and Russian at the expense of Persian (pars tilî), while a stress on developing conversational Arabic replaced the older emphases on Qur’anic recitation (tajvid), rhetoric (balag’at), morphology (tasrif), and syntax (nahvi). In practice Arabic lessons devoted inordinate attention to tajvid while Persian classes often commenced with the Guliston by Saadi Shirazi (1210-1291) on the assumption that students arrived with knowledge of the language. Ziyovuddin prioritized fluency in Arabic as a key learning outcome. One year before becoming mufti he complained to the Mir-i Arab’s director that admitted students were “totally unfamiliar

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51 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/231/33 (first half of 1959). The documents do not mention two other branches of the Arabic grammatical sciences, lexicon (lughah) and derivation (ishtiqaq).
52 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/231/113 (September 3, 1958).
with Arabic script and orthography.” He suggested making students “memorize not less than 3,000-4,000 Arabic words over a three to four year course of study” with a view to “deepening their knowledge and [eventually] carrying out basic conversations related to everyday life and customs.” After assuming the organization’s helm it appears he made background in Arabic the most important admissions criterion. A review of admissions decisions in the 1963-1964 application cycle suggests that along with a recommendation letter from the imam of a registered mosque, some knowledge of Arabic, however basic, sufficed to secure acceptance. Thus admittees ranged from Abdulljon Hamdamov (b. 1938), who knew large parts of the Qur’an by heart (not to mention several works of Persian and Turkic poetry) to Ismoil Rayhonov (b. 1948), “who can be accepted due to the hard work he is putting into learning Arabic.”

This understanding of Arabic acquisition as a component of professional development replaced traditional views of the grammatical sciences as a mandatory and foundational introduction to intellectual formation in their own right, a shift evinced by substantial investments into the construction of language labs in the two madrasas in the 1970s and 1980s. In much the same fashion Russian instruction evolved from the status of a poorly organized curricular outlier to a prioritized learning outcome. A 1958 report by the Mir-i Arab’s director declared that Russian, as the “state language”, demanded “primary attention in terms of instruction” (uni asosiy urganish zaruriyati turadir) and proposed

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53 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/9 (June 1, 1956). Such low levels of Arabic knowledge among adolescent Central Asian males plausibly testify to the decimation of the ranks of ‘ulama and even more quotidien Arabic teachers during the Great Terror. An alternative explanation is that individuals with training in Arabic simply chose not to apply!

54 Ibid., l. 79 (December 8, 1956).

55 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/430a/87 (1964).

courses in Russian literature, orthography, and grammar.\textsuperscript{57} Shortly before its closure, the Barakxon attempted to add several semester hours of Russian courses at the expense of Persian.\textsuperscript{58} During the following year the Mir-i Arab eliminated Persian as a subject completely, replacing its dedicated semester hours with \textit{tajvid}, while increasing the hours allotted to Russian language and the History of the USSR and introducing a new subject, Soviet Russian literature.\textsuperscript{59} The madrasa’s director and dean described these measures as recognition of Russian’s preeminence as “the main language of our Socialist state and of modern science.”\textsuperscript{60} They clearly gained traction, since within a decade both the Mir-i Arab and the Ma’had had full-time Russian instructors in their core faculties, one an ethnic Russian, the other an ethnic Korean.\textsuperscript{61} The rationale could not have been clearer: much as future SADUM employees would be expected to converse in Arabic (and later English) with foreign interlocutors, they required Russian at home.

The backdrop to this shift was a gradual secularization of the curriculum which commenced with Ziyovuddin’s tenure. In the years immediately following his ascent to SADUM’s leadership, the mufti and his associates hintend at their intention to reduce religious instruction at the expense of secular subjects. A year after his appointment the Mir-i Arab called for a curriculum that “imparts the two worldviews that make up a [proper] perspective on the world, the religious worldview and the Marxist-Leninst...
worldview” through “study of religious morals and Communist morals.”\(^{62}\) Within a few years the administration arranged for the Society for the Transmission of Political and Scientific Knowledge, an organization usually associated with scientific atheistic propaganda, to deliver regular lectures inside the madrasa, albeit on “international political” themes.\(^{63}\) Subsequent changes included introducing social studies and political economy into the curriculum\(^ {64}\) and hiring university professors to offer instruction in history, geography, English and Russian.\(^ {65}\) Rapid changes to the curriculum left one senior CARC bureaucrat in Moscow wondering why madrasas should offer any secular instruction at all.\(^ {66}\) Few could dispute the impact of Ziyovuddin’s reforms, however: by 1981 secular subjects comprised 58.7% and religious subjects only 41.3% of the curriculum at the Mir-i Arab; the corresponding figures at the Ma’had were 53.8% and 46.2% respectively.\(^ {67}\) His commitment to producing functional graduates left little doubt that religious knowledge formed but one part of the knowledge SADUM wished to impart to students in the two madrasas.\(^ {68}\)

*Rekindling the Jadid hearth?*

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\(^{62}\) O’zRMDA r-2456/1/231/116 (September 3, 1958).

\(^{63}\) O’zRMDA f-2456/1/292/13 (November 1961).

\(^{64}\) O’zRMDA r-2456/1/430a/51-52 (early 1964). The political economy course did not go as planned the first time it was offered, since students spent almost the entire academic year studying the history of Capitalism, “reaching the chapters on Socialism less than a month before the end of classes.”

\(^{65}\) O’zRMDA r-2456/1/518/57 (1971).

\(^{66}\) GARF r-6991/6/92/3 (1967). This handwritten comment on a report about foreign tourists visiting the Mir-i Arab cryptically notes that “we need to reread the [madrasa’s] program and cautiously make some modifications, are secular subjects necessary at all? Especially considering that they violate the law.” Whatever specific concerns this bureaucrat had, it does not appear they were taken up again.

\(^{67}\) O’zRMDA r-2456/1/2456/637/29-31 (1981).

Through such reforms Ziyovuddin sought to transform the madrasas into “progressive” institutions whose graduates could fulfill the muftiates’ practical needs armed with a modern worldview on Islam and state. Perhaps no area of SADUM’s activity has generated as much controversy or scholarly discussion as its scripturalist pronouncements on religion. These have been described as “represent[ing] the last vestiges of the brilliant pre-revolutionary Jadid, or Islamic modernist tradition” and as a direct response to official dictates. Yet another view, which now constitutes the ‘accepted wisdom’ within Russian politological circles, holds that the muftiate became an active propagandist for Wahhabism as a result of international contacts initiated during Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign, most especially the Middle East and above all Saudi Arabia. Such perspectives tiptoe around the fact that Communist ideology, Jadidism, and Salafism all largely spoke in unison when it came to the one aspect of Central Asian Islam that interested SADUM the most: the need, or at least aspiration, to wipe out folk religion. For this reason it is in fact quite facile to interpret one and the same statement by a figure such as Ziyovuddin as, varyingly: an homage to the ideas of Mahmud xo’ja Behbudiy (1875-1919) or Abdurauf Fitrat (1886-1938), slavish pandering to the Communist Party, or verbatim regurgitation of imported Wahhabi diatribes.

71 Martha Brill Olcott states: “The Soviet-era clerics who received foreign training, especially those who went abroad during the Brezhnev years and later, were exposed to the intellectual (or fundamentalist Salafi) ferment going on in Islamic seminaries of the Middle East as well as to the teachings of the other traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence, all of which were more conservative than Central Asia’s own Hanafi tradition.” M. B. Olcott, “Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia.” Carnegie Papers, No. 77, January 2007. Retrieved on April 16, 2014 from http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf. In the post 9/11-era the ‘foreign origin’ thesis concerning SADUM’s Salafist orientation has been apparently legitimized by the spread of old colonial tropes concerning the syncretist or ‘Sufi’ essence of Central Asian Islam.
72 An unsurprising convergence given that all three were for different reasons preoccupied with the peasantry’s perceived inertia, especially when it came to religion.
A more accurate route is to view SADUM as an organization wedded to both the Soviet state and the puritanical cause, in substantial part because of its grounding in intellectual currents in recent Central Asian religious history. Despite their annihilation in the Great Terror, memories of the prominent Jadids, and no less importantly the brief Jadid-Bolshevik alliance, remained vibrant in the postwar decades, a fact the muftiate’s senior leadership could finally discuss openly by the late 1970s. Moreover, a Hanafi-grounded critique of popular practices lacking textual sanction in the Qur’an and Sunnah stretched back to the arrival of the Naqshbandiya-Mujaddidiyya tradition in Central Asia in the eighteenth century. Finally, strictly Salafist ideas (e.g., the rejection of madhahib) were perhaps not commonly encountered in Central Asia at any point before the late Soviet period, but did not lack entirely in the region’s history either: the lasting influence of the Syrian Salafi Shami domullo (d. 1932) on several generations of Islamic scholars (Ziyovuddin among them) has been documented. These Jadidist, puritanical Hanafi, and Salafist impulses all featured in the repertoire of concepts available to ‘ulama anywhere in postwar Central Asia. Their prominence in SADUM’s pronouncements, most especially with respect to as historically contentious a matter as Islamic education, therefore comes as no surprise. SADUM’s alleged embrace of Salafism constituted an

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73 The likes of Fitrat remained off limits, of course, but at an Islamic conference in Tamanrasset in September 1978, the head of SADUM’s International Department, Abdulgani Abdullaev, spoke of the “jurisconsult-philosopher” Shihabuddin al-Marjani (1818-1889), and “one of the famous Uzbek pedagogues” Abdullo Avloniy (1878-1934) as representatives of “the Islamic tradition of child rearing in Uzbekistan”. GARF r-6991/6/1567/48-50 (January 19, 1979).

74 Baxtiyor Bobojonov, “On the History of the Naqsbandiya Mugaddiya in central Mawara’annahr in the late 18th and early 19th centuries” in Michael Kemper, Anke von Kügelgen, and Dmitriy Yermakov (eds.), Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the early 20th centuries: v. 1 (Berlin: Schwarz, 1996), 412.

amalgam of historical influences, chief among them the failed Jadid project of positioning Islam squarely in the Party-state’s camp.

It is revealing that SADUM’s first comprehensive statement of vision concerning the madrasas reads like a Jadid manifesto. This ‘Strategic Plan’ by the Barakxon’s dean (*ilmiy mudir*), Sirojiddin Ziyovuddinov, deploys established Jadid critiques of traditional Central Asian madrasa education to advocate major changes to the curriculum.

“Young scholars in the madrasas cannot acquire the personal commitment to internalizing progressive opinions in a manner that befits our present age. They are far from possessing the aptitude, strength, and creativity required to interpret religious beliefs and dogmas so as to enlighten the believers. The main reason for this is that madrasa classes explore only one side of a matter while ignoring the other. The religious curriculum lacks that scientific perspective which our era’s spirit of progress and innovation demands in matters pertaining to society and economy…[For example] the laws of the Hadith can be imparted to students in courses concerning *fiqh* and *usul-i din*. But in addition to imparting the precise meaning, a hadith lesson should also stress those Prophetic traditions that focus on cultivation [*tarbiya*] (morals, knowledge), education, culture, and a person’s prosperity.”

In this document Ziyovuddinov revisits the traditional Jadid predilection with education and its role in cultivating a modern society. Jadid criticisms of Islamic education developed in the late Russian Empire are applied to the status quo within SADUM’s own madrasas. That the muftiate took perceived inadequacies in its curricular program seriously is evinced by Ziyovuddinov’s detailed attention to the most specific and even mundane aspects of the classroom experience. His comments include extensive discussion of the need to restructure lessons (leaving ten minutes at the end for student questions), build larger lecture halls, and phase out repetition and oral methods in language instruction, among numerous other matters.

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76 O’zRMDA r-2456/1/231/109 & 112 (September 3, 1958).
77 Ibid., l. 111 & 113.
The Jadid critique of ‘old method’ education had always accompanied castigation of folk religion, a discourse that SADUM channeled into the causes of Communist modernization and Islamic puritanization. At the height of the anti-religious campaign, for example, the Mir-i Arab leadership quoted verbatim from propaganda associated with the administrative assault against shrines then raging in Central Asia, noting that “although religious rites were observed in the course of spiritual instruction, no traces of old superstitions and survivals were allowed [ne dopuskalis’ nekakie vidy starykh suevernykh perezhitkov i predrassudkov].”\(^{78}\) A decade later this puritanical impulse found reflection in Ziyovuddin’s selection of Mahmud Shaltut’s (1893-1963) Qur’anic commentary (Tafsir al-qur’an al-karim: al-ajza’ al-‘ashara al-ula, 1959) as the main textbook for the Ma’had’s first class.\(^{79}\) Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar from 1958-1963, Shaltut studied with and revered the globally influential Islamic modernist Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) and was a close ally of Egyptian President Nasser during his drive for Arab socialism. Shaltut’s work included a searing critique of the cult of saints as well rulings on groundbreaking topics in Islamic jurisprudence such as family planning.\(^{80}\) Ziyovuddun found a kindred spirit in him not because of an exclusively Salafi orientation but because his Hanafi-grounded views on numerous topics matched SADUM’s policies exceptionally well.

One aspect of the muftiati’s conscious attempt to promote a scripturalist Islam was the growing role of the science of hadith in the madrasas’ curriculum. Nearly every edition of SADUM’s flagship journal Muslims of the Soviet East in the 1970s and 1980s featured at least one article dealing with hadith or Central Asian hadith compilers,

\(^{78}\) O’zRMDA r-2456/1/292/58 (April 17, 1961).
\(^{79}\) O’zRMDA r-2456/1/518/57 (1971).
\(^{80}\) Kate Zebiri, Mahmud Shaltut and Islamic Modernism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
notably Muhammad al-Bukhari (810-870) and Abu Isa Muhammad ibn Isa al-Tirmidhi (824-892), while all publicity concerning the madrasas emphasized hadith as a foundation of the curriculum. While running parallel to the Salafi fixation with hadith as a means of undermining madhahib, SADUM presented its hadith-centeredness in the 1970s and 1980s as the rediscovery of an authentic Hanafi tradition originating in Central Asia. In a 1985 article the Ma’had’s deputy director implied that the Tatar reformist and Mir-i Arab graduate Abu Nasr Qursavi (1776-1812) played a role in inspiring the Islamic modernist movement represented by “such reformists as Djamaletdin Afghani, Muhammad Abdu and others” by advocating a return to hadith.

“He saw by his own eyes how...Bukhara, which earlier was the native land of famous mufassirs and muhaddith at the time of al-Kursawi, turned into the centre of superstitions because of the general animation with [other branches of the Islamic sciences such as] ‘Ilm Kalom’ and ‘Ilm Mantik’...So he zealously began to improve that situation, to undeceive Muslims, to bring them back to the Holy Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet, may Allah bless him.”

In this article and indeed all other discussions surrounding the madrasas in the Brezhnev years, a preoccupation with hadith serves to position Central Asia at the center of a narrative concerning Islam’s vitality in the modern world. This quotation concisely illustrates the intersection of Communist, Jadid, and puritanical concerns in a narrative presented as exclusively Central Asian.

These references point to the excessive simplicity inherent in casting the madrasas as an attempted resurrection of Jadidism, a front for Communist indoctrination, or as branches of a ‘Wahhabi International’. The puritanical impulse current in the two madrasas could claim many influences but reflected the organization’s own voice.

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SADUM’s Soviet context has perhaps led many of its observers to forget that borrowing from an array of traditions and precedents, some of them at odds with one another, has been the norm in social and religious history.

Unofficial Education

In a 1980 article Alexandre Bennigsen stated his famous thesis that a world of “parallel Islam” supplemented the meager and spiritually inadequate existence of the four muftiats in the USSR. Documentation associated with SADUM’s madrasas refutes this thesis by demonstrating that official and unofficial Islamic education in Central Asia intersected and indeed enjoyed a generally symbiotic relationship.

It requires emphasis that the term “unofficial” employed here refers to a constellation of different figures, educational methods and groups which cannot be construed as representing a cohesive category from any perspective but that of the Soviet state, which divided all religious life into registered and unregistered. At the elementary level, institutionalized (or at least processual) Islamic education in the postwar decades included two types of hujras or study circles, those devoted to tajvid, and those focusing on Arabic grammar. The terms commonly used to characterize hujra teachers, ustoz (master) and domullo (scholar), tell us little about the teachers’ social composition, but one may assume a diverse array of figures, from unregistered ‘ulama, to imams, to religious folk spread across collective farms, potentially stepped up to fill the role.

84 KRBMA 2597/2s/94/68-9 (August 22, 1972). Both oral histories and archival sources offer ample evidence of the prevalence of elementary hujras, as a report concerning the arrest of one hujra teacher in Kyrgyzstanz noted: “For a textbook they used the haftyak (one seventh of he Qur’an) which in reality is intended for an introductory course in the Islamic faith. In addition other religious literature for educational use was located on his person, as well as the students’ notebooks with prayers from the haftyak written out.” The report went on that the goal of another illegal religious school in Jalalabat was “to teach students
More advanced study circles (also known as *hujra*) at the feet of recognized jurisconsults present a different panorama, as they attracted students from across Central Asia. These masters granted licenses (*ijoza*) for the interpretation of particular works of *fiqh*: that is to say, young scholars went to certain ‘ulama to acquire grounding in specific books. Although the little available scholarship describes these hujras almost exclusively in reference to Wahhabism in the 1980s\footnote{Bakhtiyar Babajanov and Muzaffar Kamilov, “Muhammadjan Hindustani and the Beginning of the ‘Great Schism’ among Muslims of Uzbekistan,” in Stéphane Dudoignon and Hisao Komatsu, eds., *Islam and Politics in Russia and Central Asia: early eighteenth to late twentieth centuries* (New York: Kegan Paul, 2001), 195-220; Bakhtiyar Babajanov, Ashirbek Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen, eds., *Disputy musul’manskykh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral’noi Azii v XX veke* (Almaty: Daik Press, 2007).} it is known that such circles functioned throughout the postwar period within Hanafi parameters.\footnote{The information in this paragraph comes from interviews with imams in Tashkent and the Valley conducted in the first half of the 2000s.}

Given the official madrasas’ small size it is likely they were outnumbered by the ranks of ‘ulama and students associated with these hujras, however modest they might have been in the immediate postwar decades. (Available archival documents say nothing about them until the 1980s, though KGB documents, whenever they are declassified, will probably tell a different story.) One might therefore expect SADUM to have regarded hujras as a source of competition, especially since the muftiate viewed unregistered mosques as a challenge to its own legitimacy and donation base. The reality is more complex. Patterns of cooperation and exchange between the two realms emerged early on. In 1956 the muftiate invited Ziyovuddin’s esteemed mentor, Nofig qori Qoroboyev, who held his own hujra in Tashkent, to teach tajvid at the Barakxon, though he...
failed to materialize at the first class for reasons unknown.\textsuperscript{87} Two years later, final examinations of the Barakxon’s graduating class were conducted “in public” (\textit{jamiyat oldida}) by “influential ‘ulama” (\textit{kuzga kuriqlgan ulamolar}) from “the environs of Tashkent, Farg’ona, Andijon, and Namangan” invited for the purpose.\textsuperscript{88} A similar occurrence took place at the Mir-i Arab in 1959, this time involving “all the imams of Bukhara” at a point when the city had only one registered mosque.\textsuperscript{89} ‘Ulama not employed by SADUM could occasionally take on teaching positions, too: Olixon to’ra Shokirxo’jayev (Elihan töre Saghuniy, 1884-1976), exiled president of the Second East Turkestan Republic and brother of SADUM’s first qadi in Kyrgyzstan, taught at the Ma’had in the 1970s and perhaps earlier as well.\textsuperscript{90} Precedent existed for involving unregistered ‘ulama in the madrasas’ affairs, who very likely enjoyed close personal ties with SADUM’s leadership. More common, however, was the phenomenon of students passing back and forth between the official and unofficial spheres. The trajectory of one prominent jurisconsult in the Valley who recounted his story to me was not unusual: after serving in an Uzbek unit of the Soviet Army in East Germany, he enrolled in the Mir-i Arab before going on to the hujra of Oxunjon Haydarxon in the village of Haykalon in Kyrgyzstan’s Batken region, and completing his studies under Muhammadjon al-Hindustoniy (1892-1989) in Dushanbe until the latter’s death. This informant suggested that students seeking Islamic education by and large did not regard advanced hujras as a substitute for SADUM’s offerings; rather the specific knowledge and licenses that hujra masters could offer supplemented the official madrasas’ formalized curricular offerings.

\textsuperscript{87} O’zRMDA r-2456/1/201/16 (June 1, 1956). According to Muminov’s interviews Nofig qori was an ultra-conservative Shafi’i.
\textsuperscript{88} O’zRMDA r-2456/1/231/103 (September 3, 1958).
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., l. 36 (May 18, 1959).
\textsuperscript{90} O’zRMDA r-2456/1/570/28 (January 7, 1976).
Thus although the madrasas represented an unprecedented penetration of state power into the religious educational sphere, their relationship with the hujras largely fell in line with older patterns of Islamic education in the pre-Stalinist period, in which students developed a repertoire of skills, licenses, and interpretations by traveling from madrasa to madrasa and hujra to hujra until acquiring sufficient stature to ‘stand alone’. Of course, a degree from the madrasas constituted a requirement for those planning to seek employment with the muftiates.91

Unsurprisingly, plenty of room existed for tension between the two realms as well, even before the emergence of Salafi hujras in the late 1970s. One major instance of conflict inside the madrasas concerning a doctrinal issue (versus the common power struggles and money disputes) strongly points to the institutions’ potential to become sites of dispute between SADUM’s leadership and ‘ulama beyond its control. In 1959 a significant controversy embroiled the Mir-i Arab over comments made by its director, Minhojiddin, in the course of a regular lesson concerning prayer. Minhojiddin explicated standard Hanafi jurisprudence by “citing hadith to prove that it is no sin to skip the nafl namaz and in extraordinary circumstances the sunnah namaz as well.”92 Unfortunately we only know what happened next from SADUM’s version of events, which states that four students responded to this lesson in fury and stopped attending classes. One of them, Rustamjon Abdurahmonov, convinced a group of students to perform the evening prayer separately from the rest of the madrasa on the Mir-i Arab’s roof. After this prayer he

91 Many madrasa graduates did not, however. For example, only 4 of the 10 graduates from the Mir-i Arab in 1964 went on to work for the muftiates, and 5 out of 10 two years later. O’zRMDA r-2456/1/443/102 (September 23, 1966).
92 The five daily prayers (salah, namaz) observed by Muslims include three different types of ritual prayer involving prostration and Qur’anic recitation: the farz or required prayers, the sunnah or prayers recommended by the Prophet, and the nafl, or supererogatory (i.e., not required) prayers whose performance the Prophet did not explicitly recommend or criticize.
accused the madrasas’ faculty “of telling us today that there is no need for the nafl, tomorrow it will be the sunnah, then the vajib-farz, and in the end they’ll try to liquidate Islam.” The divide picked up traction when three faculty members sided with the students in frowning on the content of Minhojiddin’s lesson, chief among them a certain Karamat hoji eshon.

SADUM’s swift response suggests that it viewed this episode as a major challenge to its authority. After holding a madrasa-wide meeting in which each party to the controversy had the opportunity to fully express his views (a common method for dealing with Soviet workplace disputes), the madrasa kicked the four students out of the school, fired Karamat hoji eshon, and reprimanded Minhojiddin for handling the incident poorly. Karamat hoji’s career met a particularly unpleasant end: Minhojiddin and his deputy (zavuch) testified that they witnessed two of the students in question sharing palov with him and engaging in the “amoral” act of giving him a massage in his bedroom, an implied accusation of homosexuality. Karamat hoji’s response that the students were giving him dinner because he was feeling sick, his denial of the massage incident, and the fact that his main accuser was a party to the dispute were all ignored by the mufti Ziyovuddin, whose ‘resolution’ of the débacle made it unequivocally clear that SADUM would tolerate no doctrinal dissent or free thinking.93

Though the document’s many gaps make it impossible to render a definitive interpretation of this episode without further sources, both the students’ behavior and the mufti’s reaction strongly suggest the influence of one or more unregistered ‘ulama beyond SADUM’s control. In this case it appears the students had studied with someone

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93 The episode is recounted in O’zRMDA r-2456/1/268/126-128 (January 1, 1960).
who harbored exceptional sensitivity concerning questions of dogmatic orthodoxy and ritual purity. After all, the controversy did not concern any recognizable doctrinal dispute: neither the four Sunni madhahib nor Salafi commentators would take issue with a statement concerning the non-necessity of performing the *nawafil*, nor would they elevate the *sunnah* to the level of a religious requirement (*farz*).\(^{94}\) Since a ‘return’ to the pious Prophetic practices (including those which he performed but did not make compulsory) rests at the very core of Salafi doubts concerning the soundness of madhahib, it is conceivable that these students viscerally responded to the slightest possible hint that Soviet Muslims need not perform the *nawafil*, and especially the *sunnah*. It begs credulity that four adolescents coming of age in 1950s Central Asia arrived at such conclusions on their own; it is, rather, probable that prior training in a puritanically minded Hanafi hujra informed their remarkable reaction to a seemingly unremarkable class on prayer. This reasoning obviously amounts only to educated speculation. What is indisputable, however, is that when caught between criticism of the traditional Hanafi jurisprudence taught at the Mir-i Arab and the need to maintain absolute control over the madrasa, the supposedly “closet Shafi’i” mufti Ziyovuddin chose the latter without hesitation.\(^{95}\) Whatever dogmatic sympathies he may or may not have shared with the students he expelled, the prospect of unregistered ‘ulama exercising a destabilizing influence upon the madrasas was not one the mufti could entertain.

Though the relationship between hujras and the official madrasas may not have always been smooth or free of conflict (especially from the late 1970s onwards), the two

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\(^{94}\) I am grateful to Prof. Ebrahim Moosa for this information. My interpretation of this episode owes a heavy debt to him.

\(^{95}\) Muminov’s informants have claimed that Ziyovuddin “secretly” abandoned Hanafism for the Shafi’I school because of his puritanical and scripturalist views. Muminov, op. cit.
most certainly intersected frequently and in many different ways, which should serve as a sufficiently substantial counterexample to disprove the “parallel Islam” thesis once and for all. These interconnections, which for the most part testify to a symbiotic rather than acrimonious relationship, constitute the final and perhaps most surprising element of the Islamic education model in Soviet Central Asia. Then as now, the two cannot exist without each other, however much official voices may deny it.

Conclusion

The chief intention of this analysis has been to demonstrate that rather than functioning solely by fiat as a Communist Party mouthpiece, official Islamic education in Central Asia constituted a dynamic sphere in which different sectors of the state and ‘ulama advanced their own interests and agendas. Soviet Uzbekistan’s official madrasas may have born little resemblance to their destroyed, closed, and confiscated collectivization-era predecessors, but this did not deprive them of significance for state and society. Their evolving role reflected input from four critical sectors in the religious sphere: the hard and moderate lines, unregistered hujras, and SADUM itself.

Both the Mir-i Arab and the Mahad rest at the heart of the USSR’s bequest to today’s independent Central Asian republics, where the Soviet model of Islamic education has greatly expanded while undergoing little change content-wise. That new elites and certain ‘ulama see a stake for themselves in this model’s preservation testifies to the depth of its impact on the religious sphere during the postwar decades. The madrasas successfully went from being completely unknown to the Soviet state and ‘ulama across the USSR to becoming a household name among both. That they elicited
sometimes fierce controversy in certain quarters (and which educational institution has not?) hardly diminishes the unlikely and remarkable character of this transformation.